



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 5  
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD  
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

JUN 22 2009

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF

E-19J

Norman Stoner, P.E.  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration  
3250 Executive Park Drive  
Springfield, Illinois 62703

Re: **Comments on the Final Environmental Impact Statement  
for Illinois Route 29 from Illinois Route 6 to I-180, CEQ# 20090158**

Dear Mr. Stoner:

In accordance with Section 309 of the Clean Air Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the proposed Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Illinois Route 29 (IL 29) from Illinois Route 6 to I-180 in Peoria, Marshall, Putnam, and Bureau Counties, Illinois. The project proposes to improve transportation continuity, facilitate modal interrelationships, improve travel efficiency, and enhance economic stability within the IL 29 corridor. The project will serve existing and anticipated travel demands for the corridor and the region.

EPA has participated extensively in development of the NEPA considerations for this project, including our scoping comments on August 29, 2002, our concurrence for several steps in a merged NEPA / Clean Water Act Section 404 process, and our comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on June 23, 2006.

#### MITIGATION

Our comments on the DEIS included concerns about minimizing wetland impacts, specifically to four high-quality sites. We commend the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and their partners for narrowing the proposed Preferred Alternative footprint at critical locations through design modifications. As a result, this project has been cited as an FHWA Exemplary Ecosystems Initiative.

We expressed concern that the DEIS proposed 142 acres of tree clearing, but provided cutting date restrictions to protect migratory bird nesting activity for only 56 acres. We recommended such wildlife protection for all 142 acres; the FEIS indicates that will be committed to in the Record of Decision (ROD). This commitment will afford neotropical migratory birds needed protection for their nesting activities.

Another DEIS comment we made concerned adherence to the IDOT Tree Mitigation Policy. Although the FEIS has addressed these concerns conceptually, the FEIS is unclear about what the total acres of impacts to trees will be, and the total acreage of mitigation commitments. Other impacts and mitigation commitments should also be quantified. Therefore, we recommend the ROD include a table that clearly presents each resource that will be impacted (e.g. wetlands, prairies, upland forests) and what mitigation the ROD is committing to. For example, wetland losses and mitigation should be quantified by wetland type. This summary table should include explanatory notes as appropriate, and indicate those mitigation measures that are voluntary. Planned mitigation sites, if known, should be shown on maps with a brief description.

### TRAFFIC

Because the project's purpose and need specifies that existing and future traffic travel demand will be served, the ROD should provide a map (comparable to Exhibit 1-6) showing the projected 2032 Average Daily Traffic by road segment for the Preferred Alternative. A brief explanation would also be helpful if significantly disparate numbers are anticipated in adjacent segments. In the Exhibit 1-6 for example, such disparities include:

- ◆ Where is the southernmost traffic dispersing to or coming from?
- ◆ Why are the numbers around Henry so different from each other?
- ◆ Is all northern traffic accessing interstate I-180 or dispersing locally?

### EROSION CONTROL

The Preferred Alternative will use an innovative "split profile," with northbound and southbound lanes at different elevations to reduce the project footprint width. This is important in such an area where steep slopes and other significant resources combine to reduce the available space for putting a major roadway through this corridor. The FEIS indicates that the Preferred Alternative traverses some areas with steep slopes that include highly erodible soils. We recognize that IDOT's control beyond its right-of-way (ROW) along this corridor is limited and is a sensitive issue. Nevertheless, we recommend that the ROD discuss how the project will address erosion risks, both to protect the road and its travelers, and to protect land above and below the ROW. Some of these threats are not currently present, but rather could become a concern should inappropriate developments above or below the ROW occur too close to vulnerable topography. Several approaches might include:

- ◆ acquiring selective additional ROW to put sensitive slopes under IDOT control;
- ◆ engineering protective reinforcement into the project at select locations;
- ◆ using slope-stabilizing vegetation;
- ◆ obtaining memorandums of agreement with local governments responsible for land use policies to prevent inappropriate development of sensitive sections along the bluffs;
- ◆ purchasing development rights or conservation easements for parcels considered to be potentially at risk;
- ◆ extending farmland protection programs from adjacent properties to include, where appropriate, vulnerable bluffs or lowlands needing erosion protection.

## WILDLIFE CROSSINGS

We commend FHWA and IDOT for the extensive use of wildlife crossings to reduce safety risks to motorists and wildlife and to promote habitat connectivity. However, we recommend one or more additional wildlife crossings be considered for a half-mile stretch south of Henry, adjacent to Crow Creek, which is shown in Exhibit 3-25 as having a significant number of road-kill incidents.

This project intends to meet transportation needs in a highly sensitive and important natural area. The ecosystem impacted by the project extends beyond the corridor's footprint. We commend FHWA and IDOT for their excellent stakeholder engagement, interagency cooperation, and design innovations that have resulted in the Preferred Alternative. This effort is consistent with IDOT's emphasis on context-sensitive solutions.

We look forward to receiving the ROD for this project. If you have any questions, or wish to discuss our comments further, please contact me or Norm West of my staff at (312)-353-5692 or at [west.norman@epa.gov](mailto:west.norman@epa.gov).



Kenneth A. Westlake, Supervisor  
NEPA Implementation  
Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance

Cc: Mike Lewis, IDOT